

Operation Broken Silence

'Sudan Sham' campaign

By: Brian Wilson

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Led by four University of Memphis students, the anti-genocide group Operation Broken Silence was selected last week to represent Tennessee in a national campaign protesting U.S. funding of manipulated elections in Sudan.

The group began more than two years ago, aiming to provide ideas and policies to prevent widespread genocide in African conflict zones. Mark Hackett, founder of the local campaign, said the group will call on U.S. citizens to contact national and state representatives, and urge them to pull funding from "sham" elections in Sudan, where national elections were rigged to maintain the existing power structure.

"Normally, support groups in Nashville are chosen, but this time we in Memphis were selected to represent our state's part in the national movement," Hackett said. "We've been trying to get more Memphians involved and informed because of this."

Hackett, sophomore international studies major at The U of M, changed his major from culinary arts after becoming heavily involved in the activism against genocide in African nations like Sudan.

"The local response to our efforts so far has been great," he said. "Local engagement parties, weddings and those sorts of things have accepted donations to our hosted charities instead of gifts. We expect to find out in the next few weeks whether or not Mississippi and Arkansas will end up with official representation. Right now, it looks as if we may end up representing those states in the national campaign as well."

Dubbed the "Sudan Sham" campaign, the national effort will continue for the next several weeks as representative support groups from various states collaborate to spread the word.

U of M alumnus Stephen Hackett said he's concerned with how little the issue is covered by American media.

"The administration has not followed through on promises to 'act now,' and time has run out for millions of people. It's an atrocity," he said. "We're basically funding elections in countries where they don't matter, and the people that should be making the decisions are unable to."

Jacob Merryman, a street team leader and spokesman for Operation Broken Silence, said grassroots charity events play an important role in reforming national policy and ceasing the seemingly unending violence. He said the group's "charity:water" project sheds light on how a lack of resources in developing countries can ultimately cause scenarios of violent warfare.

"A lot of women and children have to walk over ten miles for water every day in countries such as Sudan,"

Merryman said. "If we can meet our goal for donations and install even a handful of clean wells for drinking water in areas like this, we can decrease the causes for genocide and unrest.

"Our tendency in the U.S. is to just kind of throw money at problems like this, but a lot of the time the money ends up in the hands of the tyrants, and we end up making the problem worse."

Merryman confirmed that the campaign still focuses largely on writing to senators and congressmen about the issues, but he said he encourages interested students to take an active role in the many charity events and presentations with which his group is affiliated.

Visit operationbrokensilence.org for more information on the organization.

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